

SELF-CONSECRATION.

BY

REV. JOHN F. W. WARE.

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It is common to represent Jesus as leaving the infinite serenity in which he dwelt, and, moved with a Divine compassion, taking upon himself the form of man and the varied endurance of life, that so he might bring man out of sin. That may be good poetry, but it is not good truth. On the other hand, I do not think that the bald idea of Jesus as one "sent," though a nearer, is quite the whole, truth. It is so that he speaks of himself, and so that his disciples speak of him. But there was a certain *voluntariness* about his mission which we lose sight of when we regard him as simply the follower of an inexorable law, and only coming to man's help because he was "sent." I cannot fathom Divine council, and determine by what election or selection Jesus was commissioned; but this I feel, that the commission, the appointment, did not alone constitute him the Messiah. He did not come as a king's messenger comes, as an envoy of an empire, solely at command. There was a deliberate and conscious acceptance of the office; and this, not in the mere boy-resolve of the Temple, or the secret struggle and purpose of the desert, not by baptism in the Jordan, but by going out into life

and carrying the spirit of self-sacrifice into every thing, — else “he had not been a man in God’s idea of manhood; for the idea of man which God had been for ages laboring to give, through a consecrated tribe and a consecrated nation, was the idea of a being whose life-law is *sacrifice*, every act and every thought being devoted to God.” His whole life was proof of his declaration, “I sanctify myself.” To have been merely *sent* made him a servant, at best a later Moses; but to *accept* the mission made him a son, — Jesus, the Christ.

Every man is “sent” into the world; but not till he consciously, deliberately, accepts his mission can he become lifted up into the great heirship with Christ: not till then is he a “son.” The act of sending, on the part of God, must be supplemented by the act of acceptance on the part of man. The acceptance must be without reserve. Not only must he take God’s gift of life, but he must give life to duty; not merely must he surrender himself to the Divine will, which is compulsion, but he must consecrate himself to the Divine love, which is choice. This is the complement to God’s act, without which it cannot be complete. It makes no odds what other consecrating there may have been, what setting apart of parent or of church, what dropping of water, what imposition of hands, what repeating of catechism, what signing of creed: it is all formal and valueless until the man have set himself apart in solemn, secret self-dedication. Balaam and Jonah and many another have been appointed to great duties, have been solemnly put aside for special work, yet have utterly failed to do it, because there was no inward consecrating, seconding and sealing that of God or man. The descending of the spirit upon Jesus, or any other appointing of God, had availed nothing to make him the world’s Redeemer, had he not consecrated himself. It was the spirit in him, meeting, co-

operating, blending with the spirit from on high, that gave him the power to become Son of God: it is that in us which shall lift us to be sons.

Self-consecration, the giving of one's self up to the service of God, is a grand, decisive, voluntary act of the soul, striking at the root of all worldliness and selfishness, and accepting without reserve whatever God may order to be done or to be borne. It is the putting side by side what the world has to offer and what God has to offer, the striking the balance between the two, and the unreserved acceptance of the offer of God. It is the conscious and free acceptance of the high destiny God lays before his children; the resolve to dedicate wholly body and mind and heart as a reasonable, holy, and acceptable sacrifice. It is the entrance into the spirit of Jesus, and the carrying of that spirit out into all the details of life, in devotedness to man and devotion to God. It is the full *at-one-ing* of the two wills, the reach of the spirit in man after the spirit of God, the approach of the finite toward the Infinite,—the soul's eternal task and grandest privilege. It is not an act of the will alone, one single, great resolve,—the vision of the Mount,—the luxurious, beatific attitude of faith and hope and longing into which secret prayer and thought sometimes throw us, when we taste angels' food, and feel as if the kingdoms of the world were already at our feet; not the transfiguration, but the after duty, the coming in cooler blood down amid the things of earth, the meeting and casting out of the kind that only goes out by the spirit's fast and prayer. The true law of every life, the only law of life, is consecration; and "consecration is not wrapping one's self in a holy web in the sanctuary, and then coming forth after prayer and meditation, and saying, 'There, I am consecrated.' Consecration is going out into the world where God Almighty is, and using every power

to his glory. It is simply dedicating one's life, its whole flow, to his service."

The failure of man so largely in the true life is because he will not comprehend what an *utter* thing consecration is, and how *utterly* impossible the kingdom is without it. The difference between a man who has consecrated himself, and the man who has made up his mind that on the whole it is better for him to lead a correct life, is as the difference between fiction and fact. Nothing can turn the man consecrate. Like Paul, he counts all loss gain; and the catalogue of pains and penalties is but his inspiration. What would deter others stimulates him: what would dismay, confirms. No high endeavor, no grand result, comes otherwise. It is the man rising to his native height, doing all things through the Christ strengthening him; the man no way lukewarm, but kindling with, possessed by, "the enthusiasm of humanity," and so treading down all intervening obstacles, till, more than conqueror, he wins "that crown with peerless glories bright."

I know just what every one says down in his heart as he reads this. I know how we shrink from such deliberate surrender of ourselves, our *all*, to God's law; and I know how utterly life fails of its grandeur, how it loses the promise in this, and its hope in the life to come, because this *one absolutely necessary thing* we will not do. We are willing enough to serve God, if we can only make our own reservations. Rebels so gladly take the oath of allegiance. But it is the reservation that kills the quality of the loyalty: it is the reservation that makes of us, not followers of God, as dear children, but timid and time-serving and unreliable slaves,—in the thing easy, the thing convenient, the thing in which we see immediate reward or penalty, obedient; but when the pressure comes, and the whole man is called on, when a cross is to be borne, hesitating,

half faithful, or recreant. There are times of tribulation in every human experience, often unrecognized by other men,—things in our inner secret lives, as well as of our outward and visible,—when nothing can stand but the soul which is *all* God's; there are times when men terribly fail, when the disaster of their moral overthrow is broad and deep. It is only the old story. The house is built upon the sand. The life is not riveted into the core of the rock. There has been some reserve in the consecration,—a secret flaw, which at the test-moment betrays itself, and wrecks the man.

We do not want to be at the mercy of flaws. In the metal thoroughly welded they need not be. Make self-consecration thorough, and the gates of hell cannot prevail.

How am I to make self-consecration thorough,—how get my grapple in the heart of the rock,—how secure myself against flaw?

1. By making your consecration *complete*; by reserving nothing to yourself; by giving all to God. The curse of the soul is its habit of *halfness*. Life everywhere bears melancholy witness to the fact. In the things of the higher life, it is specially disastrous. Whose conscience does not condemn him? Who does not shamefully halt at the very crisis-point,—retreat at the moment that he should charge? Who has not again and again turned abruptly from his prayers, his resolves, his hopes, his only relief a panic cry, "God have mercy!" as there starts in his soul the conviction that after all it is only half service that he offers; that there is behind another, blacker half, stubbornly refusing to be surrendered? What sighings, what upbraidings, what conscience-frights, at these too frequent revealings! and then what a lapse again into the old way, into the death-bondage! Man's soul must be in daily peril, unsafe in its safest hour, so long as he cannot yield this other half, so

long as he will not make consecration a thing in every way complete. Sin must be master so long as man shall be renegade. The whole man-power is not out, in use, the whole power to do, the whole power to resist, and so there is ever this wretched failure, nursing ever the deadly, growing skepticism as to man's ability to be what God demands and Christ enjoins. Man's infidelity neutralizes Christ's example, and thwarts the Divine purpose; and the second coming of the Saviour in the renewed life of his disciples is hardly more than a far-off dream of a few waiting Simeons and Annas.

2. And, next, consecration must not be mere resolve. The most obstinately resolved is not self-consecrated. In mere resolve, we have only the human elements. The Divine partner is omitted, — that Being whose silent, special partnership is the real capital in the enterprise. When the unjust steward says, "I am resolved what to do," there is no quickening sympathy in us. We are not roused. It is a man's word: there is no God in it. But when the Christ says, "I sanctify myself," or Paul declares, "This one thing I do," you find yourself unconsciously aglow, and a kindred spirit in you, and you know that they will do until the end; and you feel that your doing lies that way. The resolved man is the man alone: the consecrated man is the man with God.

3. Self-consecration is not a single act, or fact in the past, — a definite thing to be referred back to; it is not an act, an impulse, an emotion, a sentiment, but a principle brought and laid upon the altar of service, to be constantly re-placed, re-sanctified, as the show-bread of the table before the altar. It was this perpetual renewal of the early vow that made Jesus the all-conqueror; not in Nazareth, not in the Temple, not at the Jordan, not in the Wilderness only was his consecrating, but in every deed of love, in

every word of truth, in every mountain prayer, in every midnight vigil, in every buffet of man, and every travail of his soul. Renewedly dedicated was he, not by any new Divine outpouring, but by ever-new outgoing of his spirit toward the Infinite, and ever-helping love.

4. Nor is it merely the consecration of ourselves that is needed, — our hearts, our thoughts, our principles; but the consecration of what is ours, the results of gifts God has made us in the beginning, the using of his talents. The man of intellect should consecrate his brain to God, and, dying, be able to say that there is no line he could wish to blot, no sentiment he could desire to suppress; the man of ingenuity should consecrate his gift, and let the cunning of his hand labor nowhere that it will not bless man or help God. The artist, the discoverer, the man of science, and every greater or humbler man, is bound to use his ability as a Divine trust, and see that it glorify not himself, but God; and he who has money and makes money is bound, with no niggardly dole, to give it freely out to God's service, — not to hug it or to squander it, but to remember that it is *the only gift of God of which he cannot take something away*; that it is the gift of God by which he can do much good; and that it is the mean avarice and hoarding of it, the stingy, selfish neglect to use it for man and for God, which constitutes a crime Jesus more frequently and terribly rebuked, to which he awarded more fearful punishment, than all others. Take down your Bibles, and read the Gospels through with that one thought, and see how much and how perpetual is his demand of money, and what a doom he promises the man who will not be rich toward God; and then go into life, having not merely set apart, but *consecrated*, some new portion of your increase — God's money — to the good of some fellow-man, some needy cause, some social good, to some great eternal

principle of truth, justice, liberty, right. Make a habit of so consecrating the returns of every ability, that in the end yours may be the hopeful, cheerful answer, "Lo! there thou hast thine own with usury."

It is useless to talk, and deny the power of the human soul to do any thing God asks of it. It is no harsh, selfish task set us for his own glory; but to our fidelity it will approve itself as a staff of support and a reward of joy. It will ever bring comfort and power. I have somewhere met a thought like this, the truth of which all will recognize, — there is in us all, and native to us, an element of self-sacrifice. It pulses through the imagination of our youth; it is the spur of maturer love. Where we love we desire to give, not outward gifts merely, but *self*, — that which specially is ours, *ourselves*. There is none so selfish but in some sphere desires to give up self, and succeeds. The element out of which self-consecration grows is, then, not merely a thing possible, — an acquisition; but an endowment, — native. That consecration of self is possible in lower things, the long, patient devotedness in sickness proves, the grand heroism of the last past years attests. Is there not something deeper and better in us, something of more worth, something in which we may more desire to be spent, than love of friends, or loyalty to country? And is there not something of a grand help in the very thought and purpose of so serving God, which lifts half the difficulty, and should take away all the doubt? If it be a thing a man can do, — dare danger and death in the spirit of devotedness to country, can we not give life, the every energy we possess, the uttermost that we are, to Him, the all-loving and gracious? Indeed, there is no impossibility about it. The two things are similar in kind; they only differ in degree. Christ's life is only impossible where there is no Christ's spirit; and Christ's spirit is not the

gift to the great and wise, the few : it is not exceptional ; but God gives it without measure to the simple, who ask for it, who toil for it, who wait for it, who know it when it comes, and who accept and use it. He drops it into any heart which lies open to receive it, as he drops the dew into the lowliest flower whose upturned cup all day long has thirsted after, and patiently waited, the coming of the blessing.

There is a single way to do the will of God on earth, to render him the acceptable service. It is to consecrate, to religiously set apart and devote, ourselves to Him. And this consecration, as it was in Christ, is not one, but a series of acts, a constant renewal. The life of God in the soul is not a thing to be left to hazard, which may come in return to a little forethought and preparation. You cannot take it up under a spasm of emotion, and carry it out as a sentiment into life. Sentiment parches and shrivels in the first heat of the world, wilts and wastes before its sirocco breath. It must be a principle, a thing with a taproot running deep down into the interior consciousness, grappling with the foundations of life, and getting its success of that Holy Spirit whose presence and sustaining power is not absent from any, though it slumber in the many who will not rouse it into life.

To the work, then. " Rally the good in the depths of thyself." Bring the great offering, — the heart, the life. Lay it reverently, with a great purpose and a deep prayer, with unflinching faith and kindling hope, upon the altar of service. God will move before it and about it, and will accept it as he once accepted Abraham's sacrifice ; he will welcome it as he welcomed the Saviour's submission ; he will reward it with his best gift, — here peace, and hereafter bliss.

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